

**Amendments to the Claims:**

1. (Currently amended) A switching apparatus arranged to receive data signals on ~~at least two transmission paths~~ a main transmission path and at least one stand-by transmission path, each path carrying, in use, a substantially identical data signal, and to output data from a selected one of said transmission paths, each data signal being comprised of data frames, each data frame comprising at least one data element, the apparatus including a selector mechanism for selecting between transmission paths, wherein each data element is associated with an identifier that identifies to which data frame it belongs, the apparatus ~~is being~~ arranged to align the respective data signals received on said transmission paths ~~so that~~ by causing said selector mechanism ~~is able~~ to select between transmission paths by selecting between a respective data element from each path wherein the associated identifiers of said respective data elements indicate that said respective data elements belong to the same data frame. ~~corresponding elements of said received data signals.~~
2. (original) An apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein said signal alignment is achieved by buffering the received data signals.
3. (cancelled)
4. (original) An apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein each element of each received data signal is associated with a tag indicating the position of the element in the data signal, the selector mechanism being arranged to select between elements having corresponding tags, and to cause said output data to comprise said selected elements in sequential order according to the positional information indicated by the respective tags.
5. (Currently amended) An apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein ~~said signal elements are comprised in a respective data frame, the~~ said selector mechanism

being is arranged to select between corresponding signal elements on a frame-by-frame basis.

6. (Original) An apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein said signal elements comprise data containers.

7. (Original) An apparatus as claimed in Claim 4, wherein said tags comprise virtual concatenation overhead bits.

8. (Currently amended) An apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein said selector mechanism is arranged to compare the quality of the data signals received on said ~~transmission paths~~ said respective data elements and to select the transmission path associated with the data element of better quality.

9. (Original) An apparatus as claimed in Claim 2, wherein the apparatus is arranged to store the elements of each received data signal in a respective data buffer.

10. (Original) An apparatus as claimed in Claim 9, wherein the data buffers are implemented in one or more memory devices.

11. (Original) An apparatus as claimed in Claim 9, wherein the data buffers are implemented in Random Access Memory (RAM).

12. (Currently amended) An apparatus as claimed in Claim 9, wherein the selector mechanism comprises a switching controller arranged to select between transmission paths, and a switch device arranged to retrieve ~~one or more~~ at least one signal elements from the data buffer corresponding to the selected transmission path and to cause ~~the or each~~ said at least one retrieved signal element to be output.

13. (Original) An apparatus as claimed in Claim 12, wherein the switching controller is arranged to select between transmission paths in respect of each signal element.
14. (Original) An apparatus as claimed in Claim 13, wherein the switching controller is arranged to compare the quality of corresponding respective signal elements from each received data signal and to cause the switch device to retrieve the signal element having better quality.
15. (Original) An apparatus as claimed in Claim 12, wherein the switch device comprises a memory reading device.
16. (Original) An apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the apparatus is arranged to store information concerning the quality of at least one element of each received data signal.
17. (Original) An apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, being arranged for use in a synchronous transmission system.
18. (Original) A synchronous transmission apparatus comprising a switching apparatus as claimed in Claim 1.
19. (Currently amended) A synchronous transmission system comprising a first synchronous transmission apparatus arranged to transmit data signals across a network on at least two transmission paths, each data signal being comprised of data frames, each data frame comprising at least one data element; and a second synchronous transmission apparatus arranged to receive said data signals on said at least two paths, wherein the first synchronous transmission apparatus is arranged to associate each element of each transmitted data signal with an identifier-tag indicating that identifies to which data frame it belongs, the position

~~of the signal element within the data signal,~~ and wherein said second synchronous transmission apparatus comprises a switching apparatus according to Claim 1.

20. (Currently amended) In a switching apparatus arranged to receive data signals on a main transmission path and at least one stand-by transmission path, each path carrying, in use, a substantially identical data signal, ~~at least two transmission paths~~ and to output data from a selected one of said transmission paths, each data signal being comprised of data frames, each data frame comprising at least one data element, a method of switching between transmission paths, the method comprising ~~aligning the respective data signals received on said transmission paths;~~ and selecting between transmission paths by selecting between a respective data element from each path wherein the associated identifiers of said respective data elements indicate that said respective data elements belong to the same data frame ~~corresponding elements of said received data signals.~~

21. (Currently amended) In a synchronous transmission system comprising a first synchronous transmission apparatus arranged to transmit data signals across a network on at least two transmission paths each data signal being comprised of data frames, each data frame comprising at least one data element; and a second synchronous transmission apparatus arranged to receive said data signals on said at least two paths, a method of switching between transmission paths, the method comprising: associating, at said first synchronous transmission apparatus, a ~~tag~~ identifier with each element of said data signals, the ~~tag~~ identifier indicating the ~~position of the signal element within the data signal~~ to which frame the data element belongs; ~~aligning, at said second synchronous transmission apparatus, the respective data signals received on said at least two transmission paths;~~ selecting, at said second synchronous transmission apparatus, between transmission paths by selecting between a respective data element from each path wherein the associated identifiers of said respective data elements indicate that said respective data elements belong to the same data frame ~~signal elements having corresponding~~

tags; and outputting said selected signal elements in sequential order according to the ~~positional~~ information indicated by the respective ~~tags~~ identifiers.

22. (New) An apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein said identifiers comprise Virtual Concatenation overhead bits.